Unearthed

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Unearthed

by shipshape_sheep

Summary

Will is kidnapped and buried alive by a death-obsessed killer. He shows up on Hannibal's doorstep, unwilling to speak and hiding a terrible secret. Takes place in Season 1, pre-Savoureux.

Chapter 1

The sides of a wooden coffin nestled closely around Will's body. A muscular hand smoothed back Will's hair, then tested the hollow of his throat for the faint flutter of pulse that remained. Thick, calloused fingers pulled the black knot of Will's tie into place, straightened his starched white collar, adjusted his crisp black lapels. Made sure everything was perfectly in order, perfectly correct.

Will's eyelids trembled as he fought his way up through layer after layer of heavy sedation. The sickly odor of carnations flooded his nostrils as Lukas arranged fresh white blooms around his medically paralyzed body. Other smells—Lukas' cheap cologne, pine trees, freshly turned earth. Will was aware of every creak of Lukas' heavy leather boots, every chirping insect, every rustling branch. His senses were in overdrive, every nerve singing, desperately trying to compensate for the fact that his muscles were locked and frozen. He could see the moonless sky over Lukas' massive shoulder. Clouds boiled and rumbled.

Will managed to part his lips a fraction of an inch, tried to speak. Tried to scream. Only exhaled weakly, a faint whistling sound.

Lukas kneeled beside the coffin. He gazed down at Will, his eyes dark with compassion in his broad, worn face. “It's finally over,” he murmured, closing his eyes as if in prayer. “You can rest now.”

Lukas lifted something heavy from the soft, loamy earth. He settled a lid on the coffin. Darkness fell over Will like a suffocating blanket. He felt it invade his mouth, his nose, his lungs, thick as velvet.

Then he felt himself begin to sink. The pine box settled into the new grave gently, silently—no crash, no crude jostling. The first heavy shovelfuls of earth pattered on the coffin lid like rain.

By three AM the worst of the thunderstorm had passed; only a few droplets trickled down Hannibal's bedroom window. Draped in crisp dark blue sheets, Hannibal slept, dreaming of endless snowfall. White, silver, white. Childhood memory blurred into abstraction, leaving only vague impressions. Smell of woodsmoke, the metal taste of cold.

Hannibal stirred, opened his eyes in the darkness. The dream dissolved. Someone was in the house.

He rose, bare footsteps graceful on well-maintained oak floor. His pajamas were made of dove gray silk, opalescent and faintly luminous in the dim light. He descended the stairs. A single kitchen light still glowed, sending deep golden shadows slanting across the brass pots and pans hanging on the wall, across the polished kitchen table. The floor was smeared with dirty footprints. The door hung wide open; Hannibal heard the wind sighing, rain dripping from the trees.

Will stood in the dining room, arms dangling, head cocked back in a strange, crooked way. Eyes half lidded and empty. Dark hair plastered to his head with dirt and rainwater. His face was all bones, white and hollow and skull-gaunt, whittled down to nothing. He wore the destroyed remains of a black suit. A black tie dangled around his neck like an unstrung noose. Filthy water dripped from his hair to the polished floor.

Will had been a missing person for two weeks. Hannibal had a cold and practiced way of measuring eventualities—he knew the casual cruelty of fate better than most—but Will was different. Thinking of Will mangled in a ditch or decaying in an unmarked grave somewhere, Hannibal felt slighted, betrayed. Something valuable and irreplaceable had been robbed from him. It was a grave personal offense.

Seeing Will standing in front of him now, torn apart, hollow-eyed, haunted, Hannibal felt profound relief mingled with rage. Someone had taken something dear to him, and returned it in terrible condition.

“Will.” Hannibal kept his voice low and steady. He approached Will with slow, measured steps. Will held eerily still, but his eyes marked Hannibal's movement the way a rabbit tracks a hunter, all pupils and glassy shine. As Hannibal got close, he saw that Will's chest was rising and falling rapidly—quick, staccato breaths. At his sides, Will's hands trembled and jerked and twitched. His lips pulled back from his teeth in a snarl.

“Will,” Hannibal repeated, more roughly. He grasped Will's shoulder. He felt dampness on his palm.

The light was faint, but the stains on Will's suit looked nearly black. Hannibal drew his hand away and examined it. Black on his fingers. He recognized the color, ruby fading to muddy ink.

Will was soaked in blood.

Chapter 2

A wonder he didn't notice the blood before. Its harsh metallic odor swarmed in Hannibal's nostrils. The blood covered Will's hands like scarlet gloves and reached most of the way to his elbows. More blood dashed and speckled Will's face and shirtfront in wild, impressionistic spatters. The smell of recent violence clung to Will—like burnt wiring, scorched ozone, ashes. Other smells—wet turned earth, sodden wool, wilted flowers.

Limp white petals clung to Will's hair and suit like snowflakes. Hannibal remembered the first victim they had found, Emily Halmond, barely twenty. The coffin held not only her lifeless body, but a profusion of red roses, wilted to a murky crimson.

“Do you know where you are, Will?”

Will made no reply, but his grimace began to fade. His eyes faltered to Hannibal's face. Hannibal thought he saw the first encouraging glimmers of self-awareness in Will's eyes, but maybe it was only a trick of the light.

Hannibal took hold of Will's icy hands. Will shuddered as his shock-numb body began to register the cold. “Wouldn't you like to get warmed up?” Hannibal framed everything as a question, trying to hold Will's attention, as fractured as it might be. He squeezed Will's hands, then clasped his shoulder, guiding him towards the stairs. “Here. Would you come with me?”

All at once Will collapsed against him, so heavy Hannibal staggered. The sheared copper smell of blood was overwhelming. So was Will's panic—his rabbit-quick heartbeat, his bitter sweat, his trembling. Hannibal felt another bright, hot pang of rage, deep in his chest. Someone had mishandled Will, brutally, clumsily—someone had been so monstrously careless. Someone who did not have the right to be playing with such a rare and fragile toy.

The intensity of his anger surprised him. Normally Hannibal's emotions were muted, desaturated. Watercolors. This was a slash of vivid red tempera.

Hannibal led Will up the stairs and into the bathroom. Gleaming white tile, restored brass fixtures, enormous clawfoot bathtub. Will sank to the floor and leaned against the side of the tub while Hannibal ran a warm bath. Steam began to blur the edges of the room.

Hannibal knelt beside Will as the water poured. He tilted his head in order to catch Will's eye—he was staring at some invisible point past the wall, his entire body hunched and tensed and coiled, fingers gripping his knees like talons. Will's eyes were sunken, but bright. Deliriously bright. Will was frightened, yes, but he was also frightening. In the depths of his terror all those walls he tried so desperately to maintain had been eroded. Hannibal felt something smolder inside him, a dark anticipation.

He began to unbutton Will's suit jacket. It was a strange, old-fashioned style, with long narrow lapels. Will made a noise that was almost a mutter, lifted his hands, undid the buttons himself. He shrugged the jacket away. Something fell out of a sleeve or pocket—a good-sized

medical scalpel, caked in dried blood. It spun across the spotless floor. Will didn't seem to take any notice. Politely, Hannibal followed suit.

Will stripped away the rest of the clothing as if he suddenly couldn't stand to have it touching his body, ripping seams and sending buttons scattering, until there was nothing but a heap of bloody rags strewn across the floor. Hannibal knew Will as an oddly modest man who would rather be hidden under layers of flannel and tweed, but right now Will didn't seem concerned to be seen naked. His skin was stark white, almost translucent. The sharpness of his hipbones was startling, the shadow-ladder of his ribs faintly visible. The early stages of malnutrition. What, exactly, had dear Will been through in these past weeks?

Hannibal helped Will into the bath. The water began to take on a grayish tinge as Will leaned back, eyes closed, tense muscles finally going slack. Hannibal rolled up his sleeves and used a woven washcloth to clean the grime from Will's hair. Threads of blood uncurled in the water.

Hannibal saw a bruised indentation in the crook of Will's arm where an IV had been inserted. Another sharp twinge of rage made his heartbeat quicken and his mouth tighten into a thin line.

Will was out of the bath and sitting on the brocade bedspread of the guest bedroom, one of Hannibal's heavy white towels wrapped around his shoulders. Hannibal found him a crisp undershirt and a pair of drawstring linen pajama pants to wear, both rather large on him, revealing the sharpness of his collarbones, wrists, and ankles. Hannibal began to mentally assemble a breakfast menu, strong good coffee and hearty protein.

He sat beside Will in silence for a while. Will said nothing, only sat with his arms folded around his waist, his face vacant but not peaceful. After a long space of time, Hannibal stood up and turned out the light. The neat little room filled with shadows. Rain slithered down the window, casting a dappled pattern across the bed.

“No hospitals.” If Hannibal hadn't seen Will speak, he would not have believed the voice belonged to him. The words were bent and broken and hoarse. “No police. Do not call Jack Crawford, do not call Alana. Please.”

Only on the last word did Hannibal recognize this ghostly, tormented man as Will Graham. Hannibal shook his head. “No one will know you're here.”

“I trust you,” Will said. In the darkness, his eyes glittered with desperate tears.

“I will take care of you, Will.” Hannibal thought of the scalpel, the way the blood had dried almost to the precise red of the rose petals scattered on the young woman's body. “I'll take care of everything.”

Chapter 3

“She was alive when he buried her.” Lila Cabbott, the second victim, lay on a steel table. Wilted red petals clung to her blue-white body. Will and Beverly looked down at her—they had to stand very close because the morgue was very small, unnaturally small. The floor was littered with brittle, withered roses. “Look at the damage to her fingernails.”

“Painted,” Will muttered, lifting Lila's delicate hand. Her nails were painted a milky pink, like the inside of a shell. “Her hair's been cut and styled. Like Emily.”

“He must have done all that when he had them sedated and hooked up to IVs.” Beverly's comforting, familiar voice seemed distorted. There was a roaring in Will's ears, a thudding in his temples. “Why not just kill them? Why is he holding onto them for weeks?”

“He's performing a service.” Will brushed his fingertips along Lila's cold cheek. “Taking care of them. Honoring them.”

“Will?” A note of alarm in Beverly's voice.

Will's hands were soaked in blood. He painted red marks on Lila's pale skin.

“Will.” Will turned, trembling, suddenly aware the room had shrunk to barely the width of the gurney. He was shin-deep in black dirt and dead flowers. Now Beverly was gone and Hannibal stood beside him. His tailored suit was pure white. His eyes were black. He asked, polite, curious: “What did he do to you, Will?” Or maybe it was, “What did you do to him?” Will's vision was blurred, his heartbeat manic.

Will tried to speak, but his mouth was full of earth. The buzzing in his head was like the swarming of millions of wasps.

Now Lukas whispered a razor along Will's throat, clearing stubble.

Now Hannibal held him underwater in the bathtub with large, powerful hands.

Now Will's stiff fingers struggled to close around the handle of a scalpel.

Now...

Now the darkness. And the sweet choking odor of carnations. And the awful heaviness in his lungs. Too heavy to scream.

Hannibal went downstairs. The house was filled with a silence so heavy and profound it was almost musical. The door Will had staggered through still hung open, swaying in the night breeze. At last the rain had stopped. The air was fragrant with jasmine and wet earth.

Hannibal shut the door tight, securing the heavy lock with a click. The clock on the wall, a beautiful contraption of brass and carved black oak he purchased in Germany years earlier, read half past four AM.

First Hannibal scrubbed the footprints off the hardwood. It was difficult work, making sure no trace would be left behind, and when he was finished his back ached. No longer as young as he once was. Then he went into the bathroom and stuffed the filthy clothes into a paper bag. He picked up the scalpel and turned it over in his hand, feeling its coolness on his palm, the rough texture of dried blood on his fingers.

Hannibal's mouth thinned as he slipped the scalpel into the silk pocket of his pajama shirt. There was an antique snuff box of genuine silver in his study—Hannibal thought he might clean the scalpel and keep it there, where he might take it down and look at it at his leisure. Had Will gripped the scalpel, his teeth gritted, his eyes hell-bright? Had he stabbed deep into a chest or a tender jugular?

But such considerations would have to be reserved for later. Hannibal washed out the inside of the bathtub and made certain the tile floor was spotless. Then he took the clothes down the basement and burned them in a small furnace. It was far from the first time the furnace had been used to incinerate clothes. The suit was peculiar—no labels, hand-tailored. The stitches were looped with a careful but clumsy hand.

The fabric smouldered into ash. Hannibal stared through the grate and into the flames, thinking about the bruise in the crook of Will's arm, the way Will's eyes glittered emptily in the dark bedroom. Hannibal thought about the intense sting of rage that had spread through his chest when he thought of someone else handling and controlling Will's body, his mind. That rage was stronger and cleaner than anything he had felt in a very long time.

When all the work was done, Hannibal lay down on the silk sofa in the parlor and fell into a shallow, dreamless sleep that lasted almost until dawn. When he woke, he immediately went to check on Will. The rumpled bedclothes were tossed everywhere. Pale early sunlight streamed through the half-open curtains, the kind of clear light that only comes after a heavy storm.

Will had vanished.

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